

32/A REGISTRY

FILE: ~~32~~ 1-2

ROUTING AND RECORD SHEET

SUBJECT: (Optional)

Employee Bulletin on Acquisition of New Paintings

DD/A Registry

82-1973

FROM:

Bruce T. Johnson
Chairman, Fine Arts Commission
2D00 Hqs Bldg

EXTENSION

NO.

DATE

9 AUG 1982

TO: (Officer designation, room number, and building)

DATE

RECEIVED

FORWARDED

OFFICER'S INITIALS

COMMENTS (Number each comment to show from whom to whom. Draw a line across column after each comment.)

1. DDA
7D18 Hqs Bldg

10 AUG 1982

10 AUG 1982

m

2. A/DDA

10 AUG 1982

X

3. DDA

10 AUG 1982

J

4. As I told you this noon, we have recently installed the two paintings by Morris Louis about which you and I had spoken some weeks ago. We have insured the paintings for a quarter of a million dollars a piece and have encased them in plexiglass for their protection against accidental damage. I am sending the draft bulletin to [] for final editing and publication. (The insurance value was agreed upon because of the circumstances under which the paintings are to be displayed. As I told you, they are nominally valued at \$1 million a piece.)

5. []
Bruce T. Johnson
Chm/FAC

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FORM 1-79 610 USE PREVIOUS EDITIONS

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Draft Employee Bulletin

PAINTINGS BY MORRIS LOUIS

Two paintings by Morris Louis, Spreading, 1954 and Gamma, 1960 have been added to the art works on loan to CIA from the Vincent Melzac collection. They are hanging in the C and D corridors of the first floor of Headquarters Building.

Morris Louis, one of the best known painters of the Washington Color School, was born in 1912 in Baltimore, Maryland, where he attended the Maryland Institute of Art. He lived in New York City in the late thirties, and served on the Federal Art Project. In 1947 he moved to Washington, D.C., where he taught classes in painting at the Washington Workshop Center of the Arts and later worked as an instructor at Howard University. In 1953 he held his first one man show at the Workshop Center Art Gallery and thereafter, until his death in 1962, he had exhibits at a number of galleries in Europe and in New York. Since his death, his works have been displayed at numerous exhibitions around the world, including the Guggenheim Museum and the National Gallery of Art, and many museums have his paintings in their permanent collections, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Whitney Museum of American Art, Harvard's Fogg Art Museum, the Hirshhorn Museum, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Museum of Fine Art, Boston, and the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

The Washington Color School emphasized color as both subject matter and expressive content. Louis was influenced by two other

American artists, Jackson Pollock and Helen Frankenthaler, and it was the exposure to their work that helped him to become one of the supreme masters of color. He is identified as an abstract expressionist and is considered one of the major American painters of the 1950s.

Louis' work breaks down into three groups: Veils and Florals, Unfurleds, and Stripes. Because he painted in complete privacy there is no eyewitness account of how he worked. Art critics believe that the Veils were made chiefly by pouring thinned magna, or acrylic paint, onto a length of canvas which he had partly stapled to a type of scaffolding. Louis apparently controlled the flow of pigment across the surface by tilting the scaffolding and manipulating the canvas. The Veils are considered extremely powerful and original in image and colors.

The paintings on loan to the Agency are two of his Veils, both acrylic on canvas. The earlier work, Spreading, is a visionary work reminiscent of Jackson Pollock's drip paintings. The later painting, Gamma, is markedly different with a unifying darkish pigment that seems to underly the painting, resulting in bronzed autumnal tones rather than the greyed twilight pastels of the early Veils.

To protect these valuable paintings, it was necessary to have them encased in plexiglass. Unfortunately, for technical reasons non-glare glass could not be used. Reflections may interfere somewhat with the viewer's enjoyment of the works, but even behind glass these paintings are important additions to the collection on display in our corridors.